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ABSTRACT

The impact of new educational policies initiated by the Conservative Party leadership on school management in the United Kingdom is examined in this paper. The first part highlights the background of state-sector schools and their funding. Although no clear statement of intended policy exists, the second part outlines the following general policy objectives: decentralized accountability and cost-effectiveness; the extension of school choice; cost reductions to the lowest level; regional management; and a nationally determined "unit of resource" with local flexibility. Challenges and concerns are discussed in the third part, which include gaining community and professional support, clarifying roles, providing professional development, focusing on effectiveness, and utilizing accountability processes for school improvement. Research needs are outlined in the final part, which involve the role of headteachers, the degree of local management responsibility, professional development, and local attitudes. A conclusion is that although the provision of effective schools is a laudable aim, fundamental changes in the management of the Education Service have unsettled headteachers, teachers, and other groups. (LMI)

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MANAGING EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

(THE U.K. EXPERIENCE)

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MANAGING EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

In 1979 the Conservative Party under the leadership of Mrs Margaret Thatcher was elected to Government in the United Kingdom (of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). Almost immediately, the Public Services felt the impact of radical new policies designed to bring accountability, efficiency and responsiveness to Free Market Forces to the major public services. The purpose of this paper is to trace the impact of those evolving policies on the Education Service in general and State schools in particular.

Minor Education Acts in 1980 and 1981 were but the prelude to a major Education Reform Act presented to Parliament in 1987 and passed onto the Statute Book in 1988 (The 1988 Education Reform Act)[1]. A further Bill has just been presented to Parliament for debate, and if and when passed it will be known as the 1992 Act[2].

The author of this paper was Headteacher of a very large Inner City Comprehensive (All-ability) Boys' School throughout the 1980s and from June 1987 to May 1988 (during the passage of the 1988 Act) was President of the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT). He is now the Managing Director of a company owned by the NAHT called "Management Development Services Limited "(MDS) whose mission is to provide "High quality Management Development support and training consistent with NAHT policy and on a sound commercial basis. In two years from incorporation the Company has produced well received products [3]&[4] and been very close, through its training activities, to the concerns felt in the whole education system about the nature and pace of current changes.

1 Education Reform Act 1988

2 Education Bill 1991

3 NAHT : Guide to School Management (Ed. M J Pipes)
Published by LONGMANS - ISBN 0-582 07148-8

4 School Budget System. NAHT (MDS) Ltd. Portsmouth Management Centre
141 High Street, Old Portsmouth, PO1 2HY

BACKGROUND

Education in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is administered by different bodies. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, separate Education Departments administer the service, whilst in England, the Department of Education and Science headed by a Secretary of State (Politician), two or three Ministers of State (Politicians) and a Civil Service cohort all responsible for the national strategic planning of the service, locally administered at County or Metropolitan Borough level, with funding provided part locally and part centrally.

In 1979, something like 5% of children of compulsory school age were being educated privately at full cost to parents in schools called PUBLIC SCHOOLS. The previous Labour administration had just abolished DIRECT GRANT status for some secondary schools in the private sector, permitting them to admit a modest number of above average intelligence pupils, the fees being charged to, and paid for, by Central Government.

In the State sector, a wide variety of organisations and age ranges persist.

Infant Schools		5 - 7 yr olds
First Schools		5 - 8 yr olds
	and	5 - 9 yr olds
Junior School		7 - 11 yr olds
Primary Schools		5 - 10 yr olds
	and	5 - 11 yr olds
Middle Schools		8 - 12 yr olds
	and	9 - 13 yr olds
High Schools		10 - 14 yr olds
Secondary Comprehensive		10 - 16 yr olds
	and	11 - 16 yr olds
	and	11 - 18 yr olds
	and	12 - 16 yr olds
	and	12 - 18 yr olds
Secondary Grammar		11 - 18 yr olds
Secondary Technical		11 - 18 yr olds

Secondary Modern		11 - 16 yr olds
	and	11 - 17 yr olds
Upper Schools		13 - 18 yr olds
	and	14 - 18 yr olds
Sixth Form Colleges		16 - 18/19 yr olds

Thus, depending where in England you happen to live, you could be served by a system in which school transfer occurs at any age except 6 and 15.

The system was clearly ripe for overhaul, and the 1988 Act and subsequent measures may be seen as an attempt to do that. In particular, the management mechanisms used are almost certain to be overhauled or replaced. A brief description of the present situation is, therefore, set out below.

Education is funded partly through central Government grant, and partly through local finance (raised as rates buildings and businesses) or Poll-Tax or (in the near future) Council Tax. At local level, County organisations (in predominantly rural areas) and Metropolitan Boroughs (in City areas) are the local bodies, and they decide budget allocations to various heads of expenditure (including education). Within the larger areas, Districts may be designated to administer services at a more local level.

The 1988 Act - in the Section on Local Management of Schools, made regulations requiring Counties or Metropolitan Districts to establish a budget share for each individual institution to manage. Clearly, therefore, a distinct likelihood exists that once an acceptable allocation formula has been found, tried and tested, much of the management responsibility of the intermediate administration will have been by-passed, and the very real possibility now exists that these bodies will be abolished or very considerably reduced in influence. It is interesting to speculate what might be the "end-game" of all these changes.

THE 'END-GAME'

Much of the time, effort and nervous energy of professionals in Education is currently directed towards trying to work out what is the ultimate goal of the current Government for the State Education System. There has been no clear statement - only clues, and considerable doubt exists as to whether there is a well defined vision. The current (Conservative Party) administration must go to the country in a general election in 1992, and civil servant officials are already distancing themselves from the party political aspects of policy making in anticipation of a possible change of ruling political party. Nevertheless, there is a widely held view that whoever comes into power, the broad thrust of change will not be altered.

The following elements of the final picture are suggested on the basis of reading, conversations and many years at National political interface.

* Individual (however small) Educational Institutions shall be managed as financially accountable cost-centres.
* Accountability for performance shall be driven down the system as far as possible - to individual teachers.
* Intermediate management functions (and structures) shall be reduced to the lowest possible level and cost.
* Schools and colleges shall be subject to free market forces by extending choice.
* However, a minimum entitlement shall be underwritten by a National Curriculum for compulsory-age students and the Government is introducing monitoring and evaluation criteria.
* The option now exists for any school to ballot parents with a view to becoming a "Grant Maintained" School, receiving funding and a "management and administration" premium (currently 15%) in lieu of the services of the Local Education Authority.
* Industry has been persuaded into partnership with National Government to fund and set up a small number of "City Technology Colleges".

From the fragments of evidence and statements of intention so far available, a possible scenario can be forecast.

(i) Schools and Colleges will be given the opportunity to thrive (and survive) on their ability to attract students, and manage their affairs efficiently and effectively.

(ii) The character (eg : age range and whether or not selective/single sex etc) and overall provision of a satisfactory range of schools and colleges in a geographical area will be managed (strategically but not functionally) at a regional level.

(iii) The likely size of these areas could be as large as 8% or 10% of the country (England) - with one or two in Wales and the existing one each in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Areas would cover populations of 2m to 5m people and 2,000 to 5,000 Schools and Colleges.

(iv) the "Unit of Resource" will be determined nationally with weightings for students of different ages, and local (but limited) flexibility to meet special needs and circumstances (eg : small rural schools, deprived inner-city areas).

(v) Capital expenditure allocations will be determined at regional level, but managed (as projects) by individual institutions.

(vi) Governing Bodies of Schools currently made up of appointed, elected and cop-opted members will become much more like Boards of Directors with the Headteacher or Principal as Chief Executive.

(vii) Institutions will need to develop "business plans" and may well have to start managing cash flow and audit as well as preparing budgets.

(viii) an extended range of management competencies will be needed - in such areas a financial management, marketing, quality control, performance management (and performance related pay), personnel management (including hiring and firing).

(ix) External Audit (Government prompted, but coordinated at regional level) will be required on a medium-term cycle (say, every 4 years or at change of Chief Executive) with "self-audit" annually.

[The UK Government has just published a prospective Act of Parliament dealing with these issues - it goes so far as to offer institutions the flexibility to invite tenders for the provision of these services].

(x) Institutions will have to survive and thrive on their ability to meet the needs of the community they serve and to manage their affairs cost-effectively.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

The Education Service in the U.K. is currently coping with an immense challenge. A service used to evolution is having to respond to revolution, and the challenges may be expressed, inter alia, as :

* Winning the hearts and minds, not only of parents and the community, but also of the professionals delivering the service.

* Clarifying roles, responsibilities and relationships so that "comfort" rather than "insecurity" can be re-established as quickly as possible.

* Developing teachers as managers - with a broader range of more commercially orientated skills and competencies.

* Focussing more strongly on "Effectiveness" in the education process, and recognising education as an investment - with the "pay-off" being returned over a life-time and beyond.

* Recognising the need for accountability and audit across the full range of performance areas; and using feedback from these processes to facilitate school improvement.

* Re-stabilising the Education Service, albeit with a new underlying philosophy and management approach.

Concerns currently expressed within the teaching profession centre on :

* Discontinuous change and disruption

* Detraction from poor funding base for education

* Poor state of buildings, furniture and facilities

* Continual criticism of teachers and their methods

Concerns expressed by the public at large reflect, though the majority do not realise it, the changing pattern of demands on the Education System.

In the early 1980s the Hampshire Local Education Authority (England) - responsible for 650 Primary Schools and 120 Secondary Schools offered, through its Careers Advisory Service an analysis of needs for the second half of the 20th Century. It looked like :

In the 1950s, of the total cohort of school leavers, the employment market need something like :

10%	educated to Higher Education level
10%	of all abilities, as Managers
20%	in clerical and administrative posts
40%	in skilled and semi-skilled work
20%	unskilled labour

By the 1990s, it was forecasting :

20%	educated to degree level
10%	of all abilities, as Managers, entrepreneurs
under 10%	in clerical and administrative jobs
about 40%	in skilled and semi-skilled work
under 10%	unskilled labour
leaving 10%	unemployed or unemployable

the inability of the Education Service to meet the requirements of this "upward shift" in Higher Educational qualifications was used to criticise the service, despite the fact that the percentage entering Higher Education has steadily increased (explained, cynically, as a "lowering of standards". The system was accused of supplying too much unskilled (and unemployable) labour, at a time when automation was decreasing the need for just "hands" in factories.

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH

It would be a tragedy if the changes occurring in the U.K. were not to be monitored and evaluated on a research basis. If the Government has objectives for the service, then they should be measurable, deliverable and specific; and criteria for measurement and success should already exist (if they do exist, they are not known to the profession).

Undoubtedly the changes reflect changing priorities and aspirations - many of which are inevitable and praiseworthy. It seems to the writer that research and monitoring is now needed in the following areas :

* Seeing how Headteachers in particular, and the Education service in general is responding to the challenge of change. Specifically to see how quickly and with what degree of confidence changes are being absorbed. A "perception index" of the role, responsibility and functions of Headship would probably indicate an amazing diversity of opinion and readiness to accept change.

* Trying to establish the extent to which real management responsibility has passed to school level. The yardstick might be the newly created, direct funded GRANT MAINTAINED Schools. Eventually a line will have to be drawn between the various bodies - describing their specific responsibilities.

* Establishing the degree to which schools are "comfortable" with their responsibilities and relationships. Discomfort undoubtedly undermines effectiveness - or does it ?

* Defining a "Management Competence Map" for the new era, and ensuring that those who aspire to middle or upper management responsibilities receive appropriate training and development.

CONCLUSION

The provision of Effective Schools has to be a laudable aim for all concerned with the service. This paper has attempted to show that fundamental changes in approaches to the management of the Education Service have unsettled Headteachers, Teachers and others. Whether the new structures facilitate increased effectiveness waits to be seen.

Michael J Pipes
December 1991